

## DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

## Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI); Educational Research and Development Centers Program

AGENCY: Department of Education.

ACTION: Notice of final priorities.

**SUMMARY:** The Secretary announces final priorities to support seven national research and development centers that would carry out sustained research and development to address nationally significant problems and issues in education.

**EFFECTIVE DATE:** These priorities take effect October 16, 1995.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Either—

1. Jacqueline Jenkins, U.S. Department of Education, 555 New Jersey Avenue NW, Room 510G, Washington, DC 20208-5573. Telephone: (202) 219-2232. Internet: Jackie—Jenkins@ed.gov or;

2. Judith Anderson, U.S. Department of Education, 555 New Jersey Avenue NW, Room 611B, Washington, DC 20208-5573. Telephone: (202) 219-2086. Internet: Judith-Anderson@ed.gov.

Individuals who use a telecommunications device for the deaf (TDD) may call the Federal Information Relay Service (FIRS) at 1-800-877-8339 between 8 a.m. and 8 p.m., Eastern time, Monday through Friday.

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:** Title IX of Public Law 103-227, the Educational Research, Development, Dissemination, and Improvement Act of 1994, reauthorized the Office of Educational Research and Improvement and established five new national research institutes to carry out coordinated and comprehensive programs of research, development, evaluation, demonstration, and dissemination designed to provide research-based leadership for the improvement of education. The five institutes are—

(1) The National Institute on Student Achievement, Curriculum, and Assessment;

(2) The National Institute on the Education of At-Risk Students;

(3) The National Institute on Educational Governance, Finance, Policy-Making, and Management;

(4) The National Institute on Early Childhood Development and Education; and

(5) The National Institute on Postsecondary Education, Libraries, and Lifelong Learning.

The institutes support sustained research and development focused on significant national problems and issues

in education conducted by national research and development centers. The statute specifies that each institute will support one or more national research and development centers. For the purpose of this notice, Priority 1 is related to the National Institute on Early Childhood Development and Education; Priorities 2 and 3 are related to the National Institute on Student Achievement, Curriculum, and Assessment; Priority 4 is related to the National Institute on the Education of At-Risk Students; Priority 5 is related to the National Institute on Educational Governance, Finance, Policy-Making, and Management; and Priorities 6 and 7 are related to the National Institute on Postsecondary Education, Libraries, and Lifelong Learning.

The Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI), through a series of meetings, regional hearings, and **Federal Register** Notices, solicited advice from parents, teachers, administrators, policy-makers, business people, researchers, and others to identify the most needed research and development activities. After reviewing this advice, the Secretary published on April 10, 1995, a notice in the **Federal Register** (60 FR 18340) inviting written public comments on proposed priorities for seven national educational research and development centers that would carry out sustained research and development to address nationally significant problems and issues in education. Written public comments were to be submitted by May 25, 1995.

On June 8, 1995, at the meeting of OERI's National Educational Research Policy and Priorities Board (Board), the Board reviewed and commented on staff summaries of the written public comments. A committee of the Board held a public meeting on July 18, 1995, to review the written public comments and to make recommendations to the Assistant Secretary on the priorities. The Department has incorporated the committee's recommendations and explained the reasoning for those recommendations in the comment/discussion sections of the document.

**Note:** This notice of final priorities does not solicit applications. A notice inviting applications under this competition is published in a separate notice in this issue of the **Federal Register**.

**Analysis of Comments and Changes**

In response to the Secretary's invitation in the notice of proposed priorities, 248 parties submitted written comments. An analysis of the comments and of the changes in the priorities since publication of the notice of proposed priorities is published as an appendix to

this notice of final priorities. Major issues are grouped according to subject. Technical and other minor changes and suggested changes the Secretary is not legally authorized to make under the applicable statutory authority are not addressed.

**Absolute Priorities**

Under 34 CFR 75.105(c)(3), the Secretary gives an absolute preference to applications that meet both the general priority and one of the individual priorities listed below. Funding of any individual priority will depend on the availability of funds, priority, and the quality of applications received.

*General Absolute Priority:* Each national research and development center must—

(a) Conduct a coherent, sustained program of research and development to address problems and issues of national significance in its individual priority area, using a well-conceptualized and theoretically sound framework;

(b) Contribute to the development and advancement of theory in the area of its individual priority;

(c) Conduct scientifically rigorous studies capable of generating findings that contribute substantially to understanding in the field;

(d) Conduct work of sufficient size, scope, and duration to produce definitive guidance for improvement efforts and future research;

(e) Address issues of both equity and excellence in education for all students in its individual priority area; and

(f) Document, report, and disseminate information about its research findings and other accomplishments in ways that will facilitate effective use of that information in professional development for teachers, families, and community members, as appropriate.

*Absolute Priority 1: Enhancing Young Children's Development and Learning*

Under this priority, a national research and development center must—

(a) Conduct research and development on enhancing the development and learning of young children from birth to age eight, with special focus on children who are placed at risk of educational failure because of community, economic, linguistic, family, or disability factors; and

(b) Include in its work research or development related to the following topics:

(1) Effective practices and programs for maximizing the development and learning of young children from diverse

backgrounds, emphasizing the whole child and developmentally appropriate strategies;

(2) Effective professional development for educators and other early childhood personnel;

(3) Family and community support for young children's development and learning; and

(4) Effective programs and practices for supporting young children during crucial transition periods, from infant to toddler, toddler to preschooler, and preschooler to early elementary school student.

(c) Develop and field test a set of 3–5 hypothetical cases that can be used in training and other settings to help practitioners, families, and community members develop and extend their knowledge and skills to address effectively the development and learning needs of young children; and stimulate new debate, hypotheses, and research.

#### *Absolute Priority 2: Improving Student Learning and Achievement*

Under this priority, a national research and development center must—

(a) Conduct research and development on improving student achievement, which must be comprised of research and development on improving learning, teaching, and assessment within a content area; and

(b) Include in its work research or development related to the following topics:

(1) How students acquire knowledge and skills;

(2) Curriculum and effective instruction, including the use of technology, which reflects current understanding of cognitive development, the social context of learning, and student motivation;

(3) Effective professional development for teachers and other school personnel; and

(4) Assessment for improving teaching and learning, including the technical quality of such assessments.

#### *Absolute Priority 3: Improving Student Assessment and Educational Accountability*

Under this priority, a national research and development center must—

(a) Conduct research and development on improving student assessment; and

(b) Include in its work research or development related to the following topics:

(1) Development and use of assessments aligned with curriculum

and instruction to promote improved teaching, learning, and educational accountability, including the use of assessment in student placement;

(2) The use of accommodations, adaptations, and alternative assessments to enable all students to participate in assessment systems;

(3) The creation of coherent systems that assess diverse student outcomes using multiple measures and multiple assessments; and

(4) The technical quality (validity, reliability, fairness, and content and skill coverage) of different types of assessments and assessment systems, including accommodations, adaptations, and alternative assessments.

#### *Absolute Priority 4: Meeting the Educational Needs of a Diverse Student Population*

Under this priority, a national research and development center must—

(a) Conduct research and development on meeting the educational needs of an increasingly diverse student population, including students who are at risk of educational failure because of limited English proficiency, poverty, race, geographical location, or economic disadvantage; and

(b) Include in its work research or development related to at least two of the following topics:

(1) Instructional strategies that recognize and build on the strengths of students from diverse backgrounds to help all students achieve to high academic standards;

(2) Training and professional development activities that enhance the ability of educators, families, and communities to help language minority students and other students at risk of educational failure achieve to high academic standards;

(3) Working with families and community-based organizations, through such means as structuring out-of-school experiences as well as providing support for school-based programs, to help students at risk of educational failure achieve to high academic standards; and

(4) Ways that federal, state, tribal government, and community reform efforts can be designed so that language minority students and other students at risk of educational failure learn to high standards.

#### *Absolute Priority 5: Increasing the Effectiveness of State and Local Education Reform Efforts*

Under this priority, a national research and development center must—

(a) Conduct research and development on increasing the effectiveness of state and local efforts to reform elementary and secondary education; and

(b) Include in its work research or development related to the following topics:

(1) Local and school level strategies for reform that create supportive and secure learning environments and lead to improved learning by all students including district and/or schoolwide reforms and partnerships and productive collaboration among families, communities, and schools;

(2) State and local policies that support improved learning by all students including aligning elements of the education system to achieve challenging student standards, enhancing licensing systems for teachers and other education professionals, and providing incentives for reform;

(3) State and local finance strategies that lead to improved learning by all students, including strategies for the equitable distribution of programs and services and strategies for the productive allocation of resources;

(4) State and local governance arrangements that support improved learning by all students including those that involve new opportunities and responsibilities for educators, families, and communities; and

(5) The factors that contribute most to the success of state, district, and school-level reforms, from initiation through implementation to "scaling up," including how variations in context affect the implementation and effects of various strategies.

#### *Absolute Priority 6: Improving Postsecondary Education*

Under this priority, a national research and development center must—

(a) Conduct research and development on improving quality, productivity and outcomes of postsecondary education; and

(b) Include in its work research or development related to three or more of the following topics:

(1) Transitions from school to work, or to further education, for secondary and postsecondary students, including, but not limited to, development of effective K–16 systems;

(2) Relationships among students' participation and progress in postsecondary education, their academic achievement, and their later employment outcomes;

(3) Approaches to professional development geared to improving

postsecondary instruction and student learning, including preparation of K-12 educators;

(4) Improvement of postsecondary student learning and assessment; and

(5) Containing costs and improving the productivity and accountability of postsecondary institutions.

#### *Absolute Priority 7: Improving Adult Learning and Literacy*

Under this priority, a national research and development center must—

(a) Conduct research and development on improving adult learning and literacy through delivery methods and systems other than postsecondary institutions, including the basic skills needed for work and responsible citizenship; and

(b) Include in its work research or development related to topic (b)(2) below and one or more of the other topics:

(1) Adult acquisition of knowledge and development of linguistic, quantitative, and reasoning skills, including adult acquisition of second-language skills and computer skills;

(2) Effective strategies and technology for providers, including libraries, community organizations, and family literacy programs, to improve adult learning and literacy for all adult populations, including adults with special needs and those needing English as second language instruction;

(3) Effective methods, including use of technology, for professional development of instructional staff for adult education and literacy programs, including English as second language programs and programs for adults with special needs; and

(4) The assessment of adult learning and literacy.

#### **Post-Award Requirements**

The Secretary establishes the following post-award requirements consistent with the Educational Research, Development, Dissemination, and Improvement Act of 1994. A grantee receiving a center award must—

(a) Provide OERI with information about center projects and products and other appropriate research information so that OERI can monitor center progress and maintain its inventory of funded research projects. This information must be provided through media that include an electronic network;

(b) Conduct and evaluate research projects in conformity with the highest professional standards of research practice;

(c) Reserve five percent of each budget period's funds to support activities that

fall within the center's priority area, are designed and mutually agreed to by the center and OERI, and enhance OERI's ability to carry out its mission. Such activities may include developing research agendas, conducting research projects collaborating with other federally-supported entities, and engaging in research agenda setting and dissemination activities; and

(d) At the end of the award period, synthesize the findings and advances in knowledge that resulted from the Center's program of work and describe the potential impact on the improvement of American education, including any observable impact to date.

**Authority:** Pub. L. 103-227, Title IX.

Dated: August 31, 1995.

**Sharon Porter Robinson,**

*Assistant Secretary for Educational Research and Improvement.*

(Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance Numbers 84.305, 84.306, 84.307, 84.308, and 84.309 Educational Research and Development Centers Program)

#### **Appendix—Analysis of Comments and Changes**

##### *General Absolute Priority*

Summarized below are comments which either referred specifically to the General Absolute Priority or cut across all the priorities.

##### *Comments Related to Improving Practice*

**Comments:** Six commenters recommended changes which they believed would increase the likelihood that the centers would conduct research likely to improve practice. The comments included: Add statement about the importance of translating research findings to improvements in practice; include stronger language to encourage utilization of the outcomes of the research program by practitioners; replace the phrase "will allow others to use that information" in (f) with "will encourage effective use of that information;" and add an additional requirement, "(g) Increasing the capacity of field-based practitioners." Another commenter stated that all work must include practitioner-researcher collaborations. The Board committee similarly recommended that stronger language be used to ensure that Center research findings are actually used in professional development activities for teachers, families, and community members.

**Discussion:** The Secretary agrees that the centers should conduct research which is likely to improve practice and that dissemination plays an integral role in research and development activities that promise to have a positive impact on improving education. The Secretary also agrees about the importance of translating research findings so that results of research may find their way into practice.

**Changes:** The Secretary has amended (f) to read "Document, report, and disseminate information about its research findings and other accomplishments in ways that will

facilitate effective use of that information in professional development for teachers, families, and community members, as appropriate."

##### *Comments on Technology*

**Comments:** Five commenters submitted comments related to technology. One commenter recommended the establishment of a national center on educational technology or that a requirement to conduct research and development on promoting the use of educational technology be included in the general absolute priority. One commenter was concerned about the lack of any mention of research in the area of computer technology. Two commenters said that technology should be dealt with as a cross-cutting issue. Another commenter requested that all of the institutes include work on assistive technology.

**Discussion:** The Secretary agrees that technology should be dealt with as a cross-cutting issue. Therefore, a separate center on this topic is not appropriate. Furthermore, the Secretary believes that the particular types of research in the area of technology should be proposed by the applicants and not mandated by the Department. The Secretary encourages all applicants to identify appropriate research topics related to technology.

**Changes:** None.

##### *Comments on Coordination*

**Comments:** Seven commenters noted the importance of communication and coordination. One commenter stated that the centers must communicate with each other in areas of overlap, as well as establish working relationships with the Regional Laboratories. Several commenters made more specific recommendations concerning coordination and communication: Include funds for consultations with parent and education advocacy organizations; require collaboration with other federally-supported entities in the absolute priority, not in the post-award requirement; require that the centers and the other research components in ED, including the research component in the Office of Special Education Programs, maintain regular contact; require centers to develop interagency working agreements with agencies and other entities to promote inter-institutional cooperation and private/public partnerships in the delivery of educational and library services, as well as to emphasize research into organizational design and educational management and delivery systems; and require the new centers to work directly with professional societies, in order to link the research agenda to specific subject areas.

**Discussion:** The Secretary believes that research and development centers should work with federally supported institutions and other entities to maximize the impact that their activities may have on improvements in the educational system. The instructions provided to applicants will provide examples of ways in which proposed centers could collaborate with these types of entities.

The Secretary believes that inter-institutional cooperation and partnerships for

the delivery of educational and library services are important, as is research on organizational design and educational management and delivery systems, but that these are not areas of research which should be mandated for all research and development centers.

*Changes:* None.

#### *Comments on Dissemination*

*Comments:* Four commenters recommended that the requirements for dissemination should be strengthened. These commenters recommended that the requirement for documenting, reporting, and disseminating information be strengthened; that an essential component of the centers be the development and implementation of effective dissemination strategies; and that dissemination be given a higher priority.

*Discussion:* The Secretary believes that dissemination plays an integral role in research and development activities that promise to have a positive impact on improving education. The Secretary believes that the particular types of dissemination activities that will best accomplish this objective depend on (1) the nature of the research knowledge being generated and (2) the potential users of this knowledge. The application package will provide examples of possible dissemination strategies.

*Changes:* None.

#### *Comments Related to Cost*

*Comments:* Three commenters recommended that the centers be required to address issues of cost or cost-effectiveness. These commenters recommended that each center be challenged not only to address issues of equity and excellence, but also to address issues related to adequacy of resources in its individual priority area; that centers should provide an assessment of the resources required to implement the practices and programs they research and develop; that cost or cost-effectiveness research should be required under all of the priorities; and that each research study should address the issue of cost-effectiveness and creative models and partnerships that could improve cost-effectiveness.

*Discussion:* The Secretary agrees with the importance of the issues raised by the commenters but believes that grant applicants should be allowed maximum flexibility to develop research agendas within the absolute priority areas. In addition, the Secretary believes it is inappropriate to mandate specific research topics, such as cost-effectiveness, given the limited resources available for supporting the centers. However, applicants are encouraged to address these issues as appropriate in their overall research plans.

*Changes:* None.

#### *Comments Related to Students With Disabilities*

*Comments:* Eight commenters recommended that the priorities place greater emphasis on students with disabilities. Several commenters stated that all the centers should be required to include research activities on the educational problems of students with disabilities, with one commenter recommending setting aside one-third of their funds to support efforts on

this issue. Another commenter recommended requiring grantees to include weighted samples of populations of students with serious emotional disturbance; requiring all institutes to set aside at least 10 percent of funds to study these populations; and inserting the word "all" before the word "students" throughout all of the priorities.

*Discussion:* The Secretary believes that problems and issues of national significance addressed in the individual priorities are relevant to the needs of all students. In many instances individual children and youth fall into several population categories, for example, young children with disabilities living in rural poverty. The Secretary believes that better applications will result if applicants are allowed to propose and justify what population or populations will be studied in their proposed centers' research and development activities. However, the Secretary does believe that it is important to ensure that centers consider the needs of all students as they design their research activities.

*Changes:* The Secretary has modified the General Absolute Priority to make clear that the needs of all students are to be included in centers' research. The revised priority states: "(e) Address issues of both equity and excellence in education for all students in its individual priority area."

#### *Comments Related to Size, Scope, and Methodology*

*Comments:* Nine commenters recommended various changes related to issues of size, scope, and methodology. One commenter recommended adding a requirement that each center must produce at least one definitive study, and, in addition, suggested a requirement that each center must embed internal and external evaluation in all activities. One commenter stated that the emphasis on size, scope, duration, and definitive guidance will lead to biasing proposals toward large scale empirical studies; this commenter wanted the priority to specifically mention funding for small scale projects. One commenter was concerned there would be too many centers and too many mandated tasks for some centers given the amount of funding. Another commenter supported the emphasis on scientific research of sufficient scope to answer key questions. This commenter also recommended that the Department give priority to centers that take advantage of major research efforts underway and design new research targeted to questions that cannot be answered by on-going research or existing data bases. One commenter recommended that the scope should be defined to include depth as well as breadth of topics; and one commenter stated that explicit mention should be made of the desirability of multidisciplinary perspectives. Another commenter believed that the individual topics included in the research or development to be undertaken by the centers are written at an appropriate level of specificity. One commenter did not like the idea of large centers addressing broad areas and would prefer either more, smaller grants, or requiring multi-site proposals, with offerers allowed at least nine months to

assemble proposals. Another commenter recommended including in section (b) of the General Absolute Priority the expectation that the centers would contribute to methodological advances in the field.

*Discussion:* The Secretary agrees that each center should produce at least one definitive study and believes that section (d) of the General Absolute Priority is sufficient to ensure that centers will meet this requirement. The Secretary agrees that centers should evaluate their work, and believes that the requirement to conduct scientifically rigorous studies will ensure that centers are held accountable for conducting high quality research. The Secretary does not believe that requiring work of sufficient size, scope, and duration to produce definitive guidance will prohibit centers from conducting small studies. The Secretary encourages the use of multidisciplinary approaches, but does not believe that they should be mandated; instead, applicants should be allowed the opportunity to select approaches which they believe represent the best possible center package. The Secretary does not believe that the centers are too large, or that they are addressing areas that are too broad. The legislative mandate calls for centers that are "of sufficient size, scope, and quality \* \* \*" to support a full range of basic research, applied research and dissemination activities." The Secretary believes that it is reasonable to require sustained research across the five years of the grant.

*Changes:* None.

#### *Requests for Funding Additional Centers*

*Comments:* Several commenters recommended funding additional centers. One wanted to add an evaluation center. One commenter requested that the Department establish a center for policy research and decisionmaking. Thirty-three commenters expressed support for continued funding of a center on families. Eighty commenters voiced support for continued funding of centers in the language arts, e.g., writing and literature. Thirty-two commenters expressed support for continuing a center on research on evaluation of educational personnel and teacher professionalization. Four commenters suggested that there should be a focus on content areas; another was especially concerned about science and mathematics.

*Discussion:* Given the Congressional mandate to support centers "of sufficient size, scope, and quality \* \* \*" and given limited resources, the Secretary recognizes that these priorities cannot address all of the topics recommended by the commenters.

*Changes:* None.

#### *Cross-Cutting Issue of Eligibility*

*Comment:* One commenter recommended that non-profit organizations as well as institutions of higher learning be eligible to apply for center grants.

*Discussion:* The statute requires that grants be awarded to centers "established by institutions of higher education, by institutions of higher education in consortium with public agencies or private non-profit organizations, or by interstate agencies established by compact which

operate subsidiary bodies established to conduct postsecondary educational research and development.”

*Changes:* None.

#### *Other Cross-Cutting Issues*

*Comments:* A variety of other comments were related to cross-cutting issues or the priorities as a whole. One commenter requested an emphasis on the importance of family and community contexts, as well as of schools. One commenter stated that all centers should be expected to address issues over the full range of differences among individuals. One commenter expressed concern over the role of libraries and information services in the proposed research priorities. One commenter stated that for each of the seven priorities, a great deal of information on best practice is available, that this information needs to be summarized and shared, and that the institutes should form best practice review boards. One commenter suggested that all of the proposed priorities should address the needs of diverse student populations. One commenter stated that tribal involvement and consultation should be considered throughout the description of the seven priority areas. One commenter wanted the final priorities to include an absolute requirement that centers demonstrate capacity and interest in developing student-centered research and development strategies; include plans for involving students and their families in the development of the work of the center; and include plans for the demonstration of the ultimate student-centered outcomes which result from the work. One commenter stated that cross-research activity would strengthen the centers, and recommended allowing each center to conduct a portion of its work in a related priority area. One commenter suggested that the research agenda should include programs that assist state and local educators with implementation of improvements. One commenter expressed a number of concerns including: The apparent lack of an overall guiding plan; too limited information for applicants about the priorities and about existing activities; an unclear distinction between research and development; too little integration of proposed work with other OERI activities; inadequate integration of similar research and development tasks across the centers; failure to identify key intervention points in the life course; and failure to address some of the most important ways of helping disadvantaged students. One commenter stated that it is unclear how the seven centers relate to the five Institutes; and one commenter wanted to know why field-initiated research was not mentioned.

*Discussion:* The Secretary recognizes that there is merit to many of these suggestions. However, the Secretary believes that the mandatory requirements imposed on applicants should be held to a minimum in order to allow applicants the flexibility to propose work that will lead to the improvement of American education. Applicants are required to conduct a coherent, sustained program of research and development to address problems and issues of national significance within an individual

priority, but the Secretary believes decisions about which issues to cover should be left to the applicant. The section entitled “Supplementary Information” provides further clarification of the relationship between the seven centers and the five Institutes. The statute requires that each Institute reserve at least 20 percent of its funding each fiscal year for field-initiated studies.

*Changes:* None.

#### *Absolute Priority 1: Promoting the Cognitive and Social-Emotional Development of Young Children*

*Overview:* A total of 48 letters contained comments on Priority 1. Some commenters discussed more than one topic in their correspondence.

##### *Comments Related to the Title*

*Comments:* Seven commenters expressed concern that the title focused too narrowly on cognitive and social-emotional development alone and thereby failed to consider the total development of the child. Two of these commenters recommended that the title be expanded to include the physical development of young children. Two commenters wanted the title to include health outcomes for children. Three of the commenters suggested that language and/or motor development also be included. Another commenter suggested the title be changed to “Services that Promote the Cognitive and Social-Emotional Development of Young Children.” Another wanted the title to focus solely on the cognitive development of young children.

*Discussion:* The Secretary agrees that school readiness extends beyond the dimensions of cognitive and social-emotional development and that the focus of research and development in this topical area should be holistic.

*Changes:* The Secretary believes that the phrase “development and learning” conveys the priority’s intent to focus on the whole child. Consequently, the Secretary has modified the priority’s title to read: “Enhancing Young Children’s Development and Learning.”

##### *Comments Regarding Focus*

*Comments:* Fifteen commenters believed that the priority should shift its focus from young children to their environments, which the respondents defined as family, teachers and other significant caregivers. These commenters stated that there is considerable research in the field on child development and on the factors which directly influence children’s well-being. The commenters believe that what is needed is research on programs, strategies and policies which influence parents, educators, and others in the child’s environment and enable them to become more effective in supporting children. The commenters maintain that it is just as important for schools to be ready for children, as it is for children to be ready for school. Several commenters recommended the priority’s research and development activities should include: Interprofessional development and collaboration—research designed to inform “professional practice, professional development, and policy;” the

relationship between public policies and the abilities of parents and educators to support children’s development, including family leave policy, proposed reductions in social service programs, and consolidation of categorical child care and early childhood programs into block grants to the States; effective dissemination of early childhood information for use by parents and professionals; and involvement of early childhood professionals in research efforts by the international community.

*Discussion:* The Secretary believes that young children should remain the central focus of this center. However, the Secretary also understands that research on improving the environments which shape child development is an integral part of this center’s work. The Secretary agrees that this priority should include research and development activities on interprofessional development. The Secretary further believes that research can guide and inform policy. Therefore, applicants may choose to address policy issues in their applications, but it is not a requirement.

*Changes:* In responding to the calls for an emphasis on young children’s environments and work on interprofessional development, the Secretary has amended this priority to specifically address these concerns in sections (b) and (c).

##### *Comments on Targeted Populations*

*Comments:* Fourteen comments addressed the parameters of the priority’s target populations. Although the proposed priority did not specify an age range, seven commenters recommended that research and development activities focus on children from birth to the age of eight. Five commenters wanted to clarify the phrase “children \* \* \* at risk” in section (a) by adding specific risk factors, including biological, socio-cultural, environmental, and disabling conditions. One commenter wanted to modify section (a) by replacing the word “especially” with “including,” to preclude the proposed center from duplicating the work of an already-established center for the education of children at-risk.

*Discussion:* The Secretary agrees that the concept of “young children,” for the purposes of this center, should extend from birth to the age of eight. The Secretary also agrees that it is important to make clear that children who are culturally, economically and/or biologically vulnerable, as well as children with disabling conditions, are not to be excluded from research activities. However, the Secretary believes that each of these suggested factors of risk is already encompassed in section (a), and therefore, the Secretary has not changed the list of enumerated factors. Furthermore, the Secretary recognizes that the proposed center and the existing center for students placed at risk of educational failure do share a focus on the early elementary grades. The Secretary believes, however, that the work of each center will be unique and not duplicative. Therefore, the Secretary sees no need to modify the language of this priority by replacing the word “especially” with the word “including.”

*Changes:* The Secretary has amended section (a) of the final priority to clarify the

target population as children from birth through the age of eight.

**Comments on Families:** Three commenters recommended that the role of families needs to be strengthened throughout the priority. One commenter stated that the proposed priority "ignores the central role families play in the educational development of children." One commenter stated that "family processes have profound effects on early development and should be considered both in studies of development and in studies of policy and services." One commenter recommended that the priority should address family-centered approaches that can be adapted to diverse community contexts. Similarly, the Board committee recommended that families and communities be further emphasized in this priority.

**Discussion:** The Secretary understands the critical impact of families on young children's development and success in school and consequently the need for research and development activities that can strengthen supports and services for families.

**Changes:** The Secretary has amended the final priority to include revised sections (b) and (c) in order to give greater emphasis to the role of the family and community throughout the entire final priority.

#### *Comments on Services and Supports*

**Comments:** Twelve commenters addressed the topic of services and supports within communities, schools, and families and offered recommendations on the kinds of research and development activities that should be included in the priority: Service integration strategies for meeting the needs of children, families, and practitioners; community barriers to the distribution of needed services; impact of cultural factors on the delivery of early childhood services; collaboration among service providers, including coordination among child care providers and early childhood educators; coordination of research conducted under this priority with results of last year's OERI conference on school-linked services; the role of libraries and museums in early childhood development and education; and the role of technology in the classroom.

**Discussion:** The Secretary believes that quality comprehensive services provided by families, preschools, child care facilities, schools, libraries, museums, and other community resources, increase the opportunity for all children to come to school ready to learn, and that research and development activities on this topic should be a part of this center's work.

**Changes:** The Secretary believes that comprehensive supports and services are encompassed within revised section (b).

**Absolute Priority 2: Improving Student Learning and Achievement Overview:** A total of 114 letters provided comments on Priority 2. Some commenters discussed more than one topic in their correspondence.

#### *Comments on the Integration of Priorities 2 and 3*

**Comments:** Five commenters stated that successful education reform requires the integration of issues of curriculum, assessment and student learning. In order to

ensure continuous coordinated research efforts across these topics, these commenters recommended that the Department support coordinated studies of student learning, curriculum, and assessment. Two commenters recommended that this priority be modified to address the integration of assessment practices into the curriculum.

**Discussion:** The Secretary believes that assessment tied to curriculum and instructional strategies can improve student learning. To ensure that assessments are aligned to instruction, the Secretary has added a new topic to the priority. In addition, the Secretary has maintained Priority 3 and modified the wording of that priority to align the development and use of assessments with curriculum and instruction.

**Changes:** The Secretary has added a new topic (b)(4) which reads: "Assessment for improving teaching and learning, including the technical quality of such assessments."

#### *Comments on Separate Content Areas*

**Comments:** One hundred and six commenters recommended changes in the six topics of the proposed priority. Many of the commenters recommended reorganizing the entire priority to emphasize the core academic content areas. Eighty-seven commenters recommended support for separate content centers in the areas of English/ English language arts, writing, literacy, reading, and literature. Frequently these commenters stated that English language arts are fundamental to subsequent student achievement. In addition, many of the commenters supported continuing the existing centers on writing and literature. Nineteen commenters stated that content-oriented centers would have a more direct impact on instruction and learning than the proposed achievement and assessment centers. These commenters reasoned that effective teaching and instructional strategies are content-specific and that most teachers' questions relate to problems of instruction in specific content areas. The commenters suggested that the priority be altered to include content-oriented centers such as science, math, and English.

**Discussion:** The Secretary agrees that instructional strategies, professional development, and assessment should all be tied to content areas. The Secretary has restructured this priority so that applicants will identify content areas and propose research and development activities in areas of student learning, instructional strategies, professional development, and assessment related to those content areas. The Secretary believes, however, that applicants should identify the content areas for which research and development will be most productive. In the application package instructions, applicants will be reminded of the requirement to specify the content areas, e.g., English, mathematics, writing, or science, on which they propose to focus their investigations.

**Changes:** The Secretary has revised Priority 2 (a) to read: "Conduct research and development on improving student achievement, which must be comprised of research and development on improving learning, teaching, and assessment within a content area."

#### *Comments on Topic Areas*

**Comments:** Thirteen commenters recommended that technology, the evaluation of school personnel, and family and community be included in the priority. Some of these commenters recommended requiring the center to look into how technology should be used to improve student learning and achievement. The commenters also recommended including investigation of family involvement as a means to improve student learning and achievement, and investigation of the relationship between personnel evaluation of teachers and student achievement. The Board committee recommended that work related to curriculum and instruction reflect current knowledge about cognitive development, the social context of learning, and student motivation.

**Discussion:** The Secretary recognizes that these and many other factors can lead to improved student achievement. Family, community, and other out-of-school factors have important impact on the improvement of student learning and achievement. In fact, the Secretary believes that many of these recommendations fall within the scope of the priority's topics and could be the subject of the center's research projects. Applicants are encouraged to consider the most effective ways to investigate both in- and out-of-school factors which influence student achievement. To emphasize the important role of technology in improving student achievement, the Secretary has explicitly included technology as one method of instruction to be investigated. To emphasize the important roles of cognitive development, the social context of learning, and student motivation, the Secretary has also explicitly included the requirement that center research on curriculum and effective instruction reflect current understanding of these factors.

**Changes:** The Secretary has modified topic (b)(2) to read: "Curriculum and effective instruction, including the use of technology, which reflect current understanding of cognitive development, the social context of learning, and student motivation."

#### *Comments on the Scope of the Priority*

**Comments:** Four commenters stated that the priority was too broad in its scope, making it impossible for one center to pursue high quality work in all six areas. These commenters recommended that applicants be given the option of identifying which of the topics to investigate.

**Discussion:** The Secretary agrees that research and development centers should concentrate their efforts on the most important teaching and learning issues. By changing the priority to focus on content areas and by reducing the number of topics, the Secretary has made it possible for applicants addressing this priority to develop a coherent, focused set of research studies. The Secretary has deleted topics that addressed school organization and school environment. Applicants are encouraged to propose work that will be sensitive to these and other issues as appropriate to their overall research plan.

**Changes:** The Secretary has reduced the number of topics listed in the priority from

six to four, and has limited the work to a content area or content areas. The Secretary has revised Priority 2 (a) to read: "Conduct research and development on improving student achievement, which must be comprised of research and development on improving learning, teaching, and assessment within a content area."

#### *Absolute Priority 3: Improving Student Assessment and Educational Accountability*

**Overview:** A total of 17 commenters provided comments on Priority 3.

##### *Comments on Topic Areas*

**Comments:** Four commenters recommended specific topics for inclusion in assessment. These commenters stated that "core content areas" should include geography, arts, humanities, physical education, English, mathematics, social studies, science and foreign languages. These commenters also indicated that the measurement of students' interdisciplinary knowledge and students' cognitive, social, emotional and physical development should be included in assessments.

**Discussion:** The Secretary believes that the identification of topics to be included in assessments should be up to the applicant. Applicants are encouraged to identify content areas which will be the focus of their research on assessment. The Secretary believes that all these topics can be addressed using the current wording.

**Changes:** None

##### *Comments on Ways to Improve Assessments*

**Comments:** Four commenters recommended various ways to improve assessments. These commenters stated that assessments should be accurate and devoid of cultural or gender bias. Commenters also stated that the center should explore the creation and use of alternative assessments. The Board committee recommended that this priority be modified to include research on the use of assessments to improve teaching and learning, as well as educational accountability. The Board further recommended that the center's work include research on the use of assessments for student placement.

**Discussion:** The Secretary agrees that assessments should be of high technical quality and free of bias so that assessments can be used to measure the performance of all students. The Secretary believes that the existing language in topic (b)(4) of "validity, reliability, fairness, and content and skill coverage" adequately covers issues of technical quality and bias. Therefore, no additional language is necessary. In addition, the Secretary believes that different types of assessments, including alternative assessments, present fruitful areas for investigation. The Secretary has added language on alternative assessments to the priority. The Secretary further believes that assessments should promote improved teaching and learning and that particular emphasis on the use of assessments for student placements is appropriate. The Secretary has added language on this area to topic (b)(1).

**Changes:** The Secretary has amended topic (b)(4) to read: "The technical quality

(validity, reliability, fairness, and content and skill coverage) of different types of assessments and assessment systems, including accommodations, adaptations, and alternative assessments." Further, the Secretary has amended topic (b)(1) to read: "Development and use of assessments aligned with curriculum and instruction to promote improved teaching, learning, and educational accountability, including the use of assessment in student placement."

##### *Comments on Special Populations*

**Comments:** Four commenters recommended that the priority explicitly include special education and bilingual populations of students in the priority's scope. These commenters also stated that school systems often exclude language minority students from educational assessment programs. The commenters said that research on assessment should consider issues related to the inclusion of students with disabilities, especially regarding test modifications and testing accommodations.

**Discussion:** Assessments and assessment systems should be able to reliably and validly measure the performance of all students. Therefore, the Secretary has added a new topic to the priority for research on the accommodations, adaptations, and alternative assessments which will enable all students to participate in assessment systems.

**Changes:** The Secretary has modified the General Absolute Priority to reinforce that all students are to be included. The revised General Absolute Priority reads: "(e) Address issues of both equity and excellence in education for all students in its individual priority area." Furthermore, the Secretary has added a new topic (b)(2) to Priority 3 which reads: "The use of accommodations, adaptations, and alternative assessments to enable all students to participate in assessment systems." The Secretary has also modified (b)(4) of Priority 3 to include "including accommodations, adaptations, and alternative assessments."

##### *Comments on Combining Priorities 2 and 3*

**Comments:** Five commenters recommended combining student learning and assessment into a single priority. These are the same comments discussed under Priority 2.

**Discussion:** As stated previously, the Secretary has modified Priority 2 to include assessment issues. Although the Secretary agrees that some assessment research and development and the improvement of teaching and learning in content areas should be closely linked, the Secretary believes that a number of issues related to assessments, assessment systems, and accountability warrant attention by a center which focuses first on assessment and secondly on content areas.

**Changes:** In addition to the changes in Priority 2, the Secretary amended (b)(1) of Priority 3 to read: "The development and use of assessments aligned with curriculum and instruction to promote improved teaching, learning, and educational accountability, including the use of assessment in student placement."

#### *Absolute Priority 4: Meeting the Educational Needs of a Diverse Student Population*

**Overview:** A total of 30 letters contained comments on Priority 4. The comments are grouped by topical area.

##### *Comments on the Entire Priority*

**Comments:** Eight commenters provided comments about Priority 4 as a whole. Four commenters voiced total support for the priority. Four commenters expressed reservations. One of the latter four stated that ample information is available on the topical area, and that the Institute should begin by collecting and analyzing existing information. Other commenters recommended that limited research dollars be allocated elsewhere and used to support broader research on improving student learning and achievement; that the work proposed for this center should be integrated with similar activities in other priorities and the funds allocated for this center be given to other centers; that funds should not be used to support a center based on a diverse student population; and that the topics covered should be more limited given the center's likely funding.

**Discussion:** The Secretary believes this topical area is essential, and that a separate center devoted to this topic is warranted even given the reduction in the total number of centers to be funded. However, the Secretary agrees with the comment that it may be difficult for applicants to adequately address all of the topics in their proposals.

**Changes:** The Secretary has modified (b) to read "Include in its work research or development related to at least two of the following topics:"

##### *Comments on Student Populations*

**Comments:** Nine commenters recommended that the priority identify more specifically the population or populations of students included. Seven of these comments were related to students with disabilities. One expressed concern that the "diverse student" designation in this priority would serve as a catch-all for "other" students, including students with disabilities, rather than an assurance of the inclusion of all students in each center's efforts. The comments included: Add "disability" to the categories of risk; broaden the definition of risk to include students with behavioral and psychological problems; and modify the priority to add a focus on students with disabilities or to set aside a portion of funding to support research and development dealing specifically with the needs of special education students. Two commenters called for inclusion of additional groups or aiming efforts at specific categories of at-risk students, namely Pacific Island students and at-risk students with limited vocational job options. One commenter supported the inclusion of limited-English proficient students. One commenter stated that the priority should address the broad range of dimensions of student diversity.

**Discussion:** The statute authorizing the National Institute on the Education of At-Risk Students defines an at-risk student as "a student who, because of limited English proficiency, poverty, race, geographic



location, or economic disadvantage, faces a greater risk of low educational achievement or reduced academic expectations." The Institute is limited to funding research which meets the purposes of the statute.

*Changes:* The Secretary has modified the priority to include the exact wording of the statute.

#### *Comments on Agencies*

*Comments:* One commenter recommended that (b)(5) (now (b)(4)) be amended to add "tribal" to the list of agencies.

*Discussion:* The Secretary will modify the priority to add the words "tribal government."

*Changes:* The Secretary has modified the language of Priority 4 by adding "tribal government" to the list in (b)(4).

#### *Comments on Topic Areas*

*Comments:* Sixteen commenters provided comments on the proposed priority's five topics for research and development activities. One commenter stated that student diversity is so basic to our nation's schools that the topic should be incorporated into the other proposed priorities. Another stated that the most pressing need of diverse students is effective literacy lessons. Four commenters made recommendations concerning (b)(2), as follows: Professional development should also include the preparation of teachers and other school personnel, and professional development is so vital that an additional priority on this topic should be added; support for highlighting professional development in Priority 4 and a recommendation that it be similarly highlighted in the other priorities; a statement that professional development research should ensure that appropriately certified school personnel are prepared to work effectively with American Indian students; a statement that methods of assessing teachers of at-risk students should be examined; and a statement that issues related to potential shortages of minority teachers should be investigated. Similarly, the Board committee recommended that topic (b)(2) be modified to include training activities for families and communities, as well as professional development for educators. Seven commenters expressed concerns regarding the scope of and language contained in (b)(3), including recommendations for amending the language to include libraries and museums as examples of out-of-school experiences, adding " \* \* \* and become responsible citizens" to the language, and clarifying the phrases "structuring out of school experiences" and "learning to high standards," subsuming (b)(3) under (b)(4), or deleting (b)(3) altogether because it is not as crucial as the other topics. Three commenters supported (b)(4). Two letters recommended stressing the topic of (b)(4) among all centers and another recommended a number of studies to enhance knowledge of risk and resiliency factors in children and to generate policy recommendations. Two commenters specifically addressed the needs of language minority students under (b)(5). One stressed the importance to this population of English/language arts skills; the second commenter

suggested requiring basic research on the process of second language acquisition and in-school learning experiences that enhance English proficiency and academic excellence.

*Discussion:* The Secretary recognizes the merit of the recommendations regarding in-school learning experiences and has modified (b)(1) to emphasize instructional strategies. The Secretary believes that the language in (b)(2) is sufficiently inclusive to provide for the population of teachers and other school personnel. However, the Secretary has revised (b)(2) to clarify that training activities for families and communities are included within the scope of the topic. The Secretary recognizes that there is merit to including libraries and museums as examples of out-of-school experiences. However, the Secretary does not wish to imply partiality toward particular types of learning experiences, preferring instead to encourage applicants to identify and justify the promising experiences that reflect the particular design of their proposed research and development activities. The Secretary has considered rewording the phrase "structuring out-of-school experiences". The Secretary believes that existing knowledge of effective practices in this area is significantly limited as to warrant a broader, more inclusive approach rather than a more narrow focus. The Secretary expects that applicants' concepts of out-of-school experiences will contribute to the merits of their proposals. The Secretary further believes that there is significant potential for identifying promising out-of-school practices which are not mutually exclusive of family and community-based experiences. Thus, the Secretary concurs with the suggestion that (b)(3) be subsumed under (b)(4).

*Changes:* Section (b)(1) has been modified to read "Instructional strategies that recognize and build on the strengths of students from diverse backgrounds to help all students to achieve to high academic standards." Section (b)(2) has been modified to include families and communities. Sections (b)(3) and (b)(4) of the priority have been modified to read: "(b)(3) Working with families and community-based organizations, through such means as structuring out-of-school experiences as well as providing support for school-based programs, to help students at risk of educational failure achieve to high standards."

#### *Absolute Priority 5: Increasing the Effectiveness of State and Local Education Reform Efforts*

*Overview:* In response to the Secretary's invitation in the notice of proposed priorities, 76 respondents submitted written comments regarding Absolute Priority 5: Increasing the Effectiveness of State and Local Education Reform Efforts. Some commenters discussed more than one topic in their correspondence.

*General Comments:* Sixteen commenters supported the focus of the proposed priority. Commenters noted the importance and usefulness of such research in the past and the ongoing need for research in the topic areas listed in the proposed priority. Several commenters provided specific references to

useful research in this field. Five commenters expressed disapproval of the proposed priority. One warned against excessive federal intervention in education affairs. Another argued that all the priorities should be directly related to the Goals 2000 legislation. The third characterized the current list of topics under Priority 5 as an unfocused laundry list. The fourth argued that the priority focused on research that had already been done and that academics would continue to do this type of research even in the absence of a center on this topic. The fifth suggested that the proposed research should be conducted in other centers.

*Discussion:* The Secretary does not believe that the National Research and Development Centers Program represents excessive federal intervention into education affairs. The purpose of these centers is to provide information that will be helpful to educators as they carry out their programs. Because these centers are not intended to promote any particular predetermined reform strategy, the Secretary does not believe the priorities should be directly related to the Goals 2000 legislation. The Secretary has restructured the topics under this priority so they are more coherent rather than giving the appearance of a laundry list. The nonbinding mission guidance will also explain how the topics fit into an integrated whole. The Secretary believes that current reforms are more coherent than they have been in the past and the focus of this priority—the relationship between increased learning by all students and local and school level strategies for reform, state and local policies, finance strategies and governance arrangements—is an important advancement in both research and practice. Also, the Secretary believes that while some research on this topic will be conducted by independent academicians, the important work to be conducted by a center on this topic will not be carried out elsewhere. The Secretary believes that the proposed work is sufficiently distinct to be conducted at a separate center, but that the work of this center should be closely coordinated with work in other centers related to K-12 student achievement. Therefore, the substantive focus of the proposed priority has not been changed.

*Changes:* The language of the priority has been revised so the topics are more coherent.

#### *Comments on Local and School Level Factors*

*Comments:* Ten respondents commented about the importance of local and school level factors. Some of these emphasized the importance of the impact of these factors on student learning. Generally the comments noted the importance of understanding how local and school factors interact to support desired changes and how these factors interact with state and local policies. In addition, the Board committee recommended that topic (b)(1) be modified to emphasize the importance of supportive and secure learning environments as a target of local or school level reforms.

*Discussion:* The Secretary agrees that local and school level factors that influence student learning are important and should be studied by this center. The Secretary further



agrees that supportive and secure learning environments are particularly important concerns at the local and school levels.

*Changes:* The priority has been revised to emphasize the importance of research on local and school level factors that influence student learning with particular emphasis on supportive and secure learning environments.

#### *Comments Regarding Student Standards*

*Comments:* Seven respondents commented on the topic of student standards. Most emphasized the importance of the topic. One recommended that work on this topic be coordinated with Title 1 evaluations and with the work the National Science Foundation is sponsoring on standards-based reform. Two argued that such work must be content-based.

*Discussion:* The Secretary agrees that student standards are an important topic for investigation. The Secretary will coordinate work on this topic with the evaluation of Title 1 and with the work being supported by the National Science Foundation. Applicants will be free to propose content-based approaches to this topic. The center is encouraged to coordinate its work, including the work on student standards, with other related activities in the field.

*Changes:* The priority has been amended to add as a new topic (b)(2), "State and local finance strategies that support improved learning by all students including aligning elements of the education system to achieve challenging student standards and providing incentives for reform."

#### *Comments Regarding Finance Issues*

*Comments:* Six commenters noted the importance of finance issues. One recommended a center on this topic alone. Another called explicitly for studies of the cost-effectiveness of alternative strategies. Several commenters recommended research on finance strategies that are integrated with other elements of reform.

*Discussion:* The Secretary agrees that finance issues are important and that the discussion of them in the priority should be expanded.

*Changes:* The priority has been amended to elaborate upon the finance topic. The equitable distribution of programs and services and the productive allocation of resources are included as areas that must be covered by the center's work.

#### *Comments Regarding Family, Community, School Relationships*

*Comments:* Six commenters noted the importance of family, community and school relationships. One recommended supporting a Center on Families, Communities, Schools and Children's Learning as a second center in the Governance Institute, or, as an alternative, research on strengthening the connections between schools, families, and communities. Two commenters recommended adding parents and families to the topic in the proposed priority focused on examining community-school relationships. In addition, the Board committee recommended adding the word "partnerships" before "collaboration" in (b)(1) to emphasize that families,

communities and schools should work together as closely as possible.

*Discussion:* The Secretary believes that budget restrictions paired with the legislative mandate that no center be funded at less than \$1.5 million per year preclude the possibility of funding a second center under the Governance Institute. However, the Secretary agrees that the relationship between schools and families and the community is an important factor related to student learning. The Secretary believes that both productive partnerships and productive collaborations among communities, families and schools merit investigation as local strategies to improve elementary and secondary education.

*Changes:* The priority has been revised to include enhancing productive partnerships and collaborations among communities, families and schools as a topic area that must be addressed by the center.

#### *Comments Regarding the Format of Topics*

*Comments:* Five commenters were concerned about the format of the topics under the priority. Two suggested that the priority appeared to be promoting a particular view of reform. Another suggested that the topics were too process-oriented. Another commenter suggested that all topics should focus on increasing student achievement. The fifth called for a more integrated and synthesized statement.

*Discussion:* The Secretary does not believe that this priority should promote any particular reform strategy. Rather, alternative reform strategies should be the focus of the research supported under this priority. The Secretary agrees that the focus of the work sponsored under this priority should be on the relationship between alternative approaches and student learning, not on processes *per se*. The Secretary also agrees that the statement of the individual topics within the priority should be as integrated and synthesized as possible.

*Changes:* The priority has been revised to clarify that the topics are not promoting a particular approach to education reform, are not focusing on processes *per se*, and are aimed at investigating the relationship between alternative approaches and student learning. The priority has been reformatted to be more coherent.

#### *Comments About Adding Topics*

*Comments:* Fifty-two commenters recommended adding topics to the proposed priority. Examples of research areas proposed for inclusion were the general areas of education governance and teacher professionalization, and the topic areas of building organizational capacity, alternative models of schooling, family-community-school relationships, collaboration between schools and postsecondary institutions, and the integration of services for children and youth. Specific research topics recommended included the federal role in education, policies supporting the use of technology, especially for students with special needs, the role of libraries and museums in students' learning, and addressing cultural differences when setting education policies.

*Discussion:* The Secretary agrees that education governance is an important general

area that should be included in the priority. Also, in recognition of the number of comments on professionalization of education personnel, the Secretary has decided to modify the priority to include a focus on licensing of teachers and other education professionals. The Secretary also believes that the general topics recommended are important and should be considered by applicants as candidates for study. The Secretary recognizes that there is merit to many of the specific topics recommended for inclusion. In fact, the Secretary believes that many of these recommendations fall within the scope of the priority's topics and could be the subject of the center's research projects.

*Changes:* The priority has been revised to include the general topic area of education governance. In addition, section (b)(2) has been amended to read: "State and local policies that support improved learning by all students including aligning elements of the education system to achieve challenging student standards, enhancing licensing systems for teachers and other education professionals, and providing incentives for reform."

#### *Absolute Priority 6: Improving Postsecondary Education*

*Overview:* A total of 22 letters provided comments on Priority 6. Some commenters addressed more than one topic.

#### *Comments on Scope and Relationship of Priority 6 to Priority 7*

*Comments:* Seven commenters were concerned with relationships and distinctions between priorities 6 and 7. Two recommended combining the two priorities, while others recommended various ways of ensuring that the work is coordinated or that the scope of each priority be clarified to prevent overlap. Several commented on the broad range of issues included in Priority 6, while others added issues that should be emphasized.

*Discussion:* The Secretary agrees that distinctions between priorities 6 and 7 need to be clarified, but does not agree that a single center can address the complex issues in both postsecondary education and adult literacy and learning. The Secretary agrees that it is important for the centers to coordinate work on issues of mutual interest.

*Changes:* The title of Priority 6 has been changed to: "Improving Postsecondary Education" to distinguish its focus from priority 7. Section (a) is changed to: "Conduct research and development on improving quality, productivity and outcomes of postsecondary education." Applicants will be permitted to select three or more topics for research from among those listed. Non-binding mission guidance will suggest ways of coordinating the work of the two centers.

#### *Comments on Emphasizing a Continuous View of Education*

*Comments:* Three commenters argued for a broader view of postsecondary students and a more continuous view of education, consistent with the theme of lifelong learning. Three advocated inclusion of community colleges in the work on

postsecondary education. Eight commenters recommended linking research on postsecondary education with various other reform issues including: Teacher education; links to communities; promotion of private/public partnerships in service delivery; and employment opportunities for high-risk students and for the non-college bound. Two commenters advocated a K-16 approach to education reform.

**Discussion:** The Secretary agrees that this priority should reflect a continuous view of education, including an emphasis on K-16 approaches to education improvement and teacher education. The Secretary encourages the inclusion of various groups of participants and institutions, including community colleges.

**Changes:** The Secretary has omitted (b)(5): "Articulation between secondary and postsecondary education," and has amended (b)(1) to read: "Transitions from school to work, or to further education, for secondary and postsecondary students, including, but not limited to, development of effective K-16 systems."

#### *Comments on Faculty Development*

**Comments:** Three commenters recommended inclusion of research on faculty development, especially for improving student achievement. Others recommended a focus on professional development, including interprofessional development for educators at various academic levels. The Board committee recommended adding teacher education as an express part of this priority in order to emphasize the need for research and development related to the professional development of K-12 teachers.

**Discussion:** The Secretary agrees that faculty development is an important aspect of improving the quality of postsecondary education. The Secretary also agrees that postsecondary institutions are critical in improving the preparation of K-12 educators.

**Changes:** Section (b)(3) will include a new topic: "Approaches to professional development geared to improving postsecondary instruction and student learning, including the preparation of K-12 educators."

#### *Comments on Institutional Productivity, Faculty Rewards, and Finance*

**Comments:** Three commenters advocated various aspects of improving the management and productivity of postsecondary institutions, including a focus on faculty productivity and reward structures.

**Discussion:** The Secretary agrees that these are important issues and believes that they are already included in the statement on "Containing costs and improving the productivity and accountability of postsecondary institutions."

**Changes:** None.

#### *Comments on Emphasizing Library Services*

**Comments:** Three commenters recommended an emphasis on research on library services.

**Discussion:** While the Secretary agrees that libraries are important aspects of postsecondary education, he does not believe

that this topic is appropriate as a separate research topic for this priority. However, the Secretary has included the use of libraries in (b)(2) of Priority 7.

**Changes:** None.

**Absolute Priority 7: Improving Adult Learning and Literacy Overview:** A total of 21 letters provided comments on Priority 7. Some commenters discussed more than one topic in their correspondence.

#### *Comments on Organizational Strategies, Methods and Delivery Systems*

**Comments:** Four commenters recommended that greater attention be paid to developing effective delivery systems through better organizational strategies, and four others asked that libraries be specified within the research activities.

**Discussion:** The Secretary agrees that greater attention be paid to developing effective delivery systems through better organizational strategies, including the use of libraries.

**Changes:** Section (b)(2) has been amended to read: "Effective strategies and technology for providers, including libraries, community organizations, and family literacy programs, \* \* \*"

#### *Comments on Workplace Skills*

**Comments:** Two commenters asked that more work be done in developing skills for use in the workplace and two asked that the research on workplace skills be coordinated with that of the Institute on Postsecondary Education so as to differentiate the basic skills from the levels and kinds of skills generally considered the province of postsecondary institutions' preparation of students for work. The Board committee recommended deleting the word "cognitive" from (b)(1) and replacing it with the phrase "linguistic, quantitative and reasoning" to clarify the myriad of skills to which this Center's research and development might pertain. The Board also recommended that an explicit reference to computer skills be added.

**Discussion:** The Secretary agrees that adult learning and literacy programs can provide a variety of skills useful in the workforce, including computer literacy, that postsecondary institutions can generally provide skills that are useful for higher level workforce preparedness, and that research on all these skills will profit from collaborative work.

**Changes:** Section (a) has been amended to read: "Conduct research and development on improving adult learning and literacy through delivery methods and systems other than postsecondary institutions, including the skills needed for work and responsible citizenship." In addition, section (b)(1) has been amended to read: "Adult acquisition of knowledge and development of linguistic, quantitative, and reasoning skills, including adult acquisition of second language skills and computer skills."

#### *Comments on Instructional Considerations*

**Comments:** Two commenters wanted specific mention of family literacy, and two emphasized the importance of instructional strategies and materials. The Board committee recommended adding a specific

reference to the use of technology for professional development in order to encourage further use of technology toward the goals of this priority.

**Discussion:** The Secretary agrees that family literacy is a vital part of the provision of literacy and related instruction and services. The Secretary believes that the importance of instructional strategies and materials is already apparent in the priority in sections (b) (2), (3) and (4).

**Changes:** Section (b)(2) has been amended to read: "Effective strategies and technology for providers, including libraries, community organizations, and family literacy programs, \* \* \*". Section (b)(3) has been revised to include a specific reference to the use of technology for professional development.

#### *Comments on Special Populations*

**Comments:** Two commenters recommended the specific mention of target populations, including those with learning disabilities, learning disorders and other special needs, and one recommended much greater attention to diversity in general and English as a second language programs and instruction in particular.

**Discussion:** The Secretary agrees that much more sophisticated identification methods have shown us that an increasingly large number of adults have special learning needs. The Secretary further agrees that burgeoning numbers of adults needing English as second language instruction are asking for programs.

**Changes:** Section (b)(2) has been amended to read: "Effective strategies and technology for providers, including libraries, community organizations, and family literacy programs, to improve adult learning and literacy for all adult populations, including adults with special needs and those needing English as second language instruction." In addition, section (b)(3) has been amended to read: "Effective methods, including use of technology, for professional development of instructional staff for adult education and literacy programs, including English as second language programs and programs for adults with special needs."

#### *Comments on Research Methodology*

**Comments:** Two commenters called for greater practitioner involvement in the design and conduct of research.

**Discussion:** The Secretary agrees that such participation would be a valuable ingredient in carrying out the research under this Priority. The Secretary encourages practitioner involvement, but does not believe this should be mandated.

**Changes:** None.

#### *Post-Award Requirements Comments*

**Comments:** One comment was received on the post-award requirements. This commenter recommended dropping the five percent set-aside for supporting activities that fall within the center's priority area and are designed and mutually agreed to by the center and OERI. The commenter stated a belief that the set-aside modifies the intention of the appropriators by reducing the center awards by five percent to provide additional discretionary funds for the agency

not acknowledged in the formal appropriation process. The commenter also suggested that the word "synthesizes" in paragraph (d) has a technical meaning that may not be appropriate in the context of post-award requirements, and suggests using "document" instead, as well as adding "actual impact" instead of "potential impact."

**Discussion:** The Secretary does not believe that a 5 percent set-aside for the described activities is unreasonable or an attempt to circumvent the appropriations process. The five percent set-aside will be used by the centers for activities which enable them to work more closely with each other. The Secretary agrees that synthesis has a technical meaning and believes that it is an appropriate activity for the centers. The Secretary also believes that it is appropriate for centers to describe potential impact as well as observable impact to date.

**Changes:** None.

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[CFDA Nos.: 84.305 A and B, 84.306A, 84.307A, 84.308A, and 84.309 A and B]

**Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)—Education Research and Development Centers Program; Notice Inviting Applications for New Awards for Fiscal Year (FY) 1996**

**Purpose of Program:** To support seven national research and development centers that would carry out sustained research and development to address nationally significant problems and issues in education.

**Eligible Applicants:** The following are eligible for a new award under this program: institutions of higher education, institutions of higher education in consort with public agencies or private nonprofit organizations, and interstate agencies

established by compact that operate subsidiary bodies established to conduct postsecondary educational research and development.

**Deadline for Transmittal of Applications:** December 15, 1995.

**Applications Available:** September 29, 1995.

**Estimated Available Funds:** The seven centers will be awarded as cooperative agreements. In fiscal year 1996, \$21,350,000 is expected to be available for the first year of funding for the seven national research and development centers. The following table indicates the estimated funding levels over the five-year project period. The funding levels for years 1 through 5 are estimates. Actual funding will depend upon the availability of funds and needs as reflected in the approved application.

Priority area	Fiscal year				
	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Enhancing young children's development and learning .....	2,750,000	2,750,000	2,750,000	2,750,000	2,750,000
Improving student learning and achievement <sup>1</sup> .....	5,000,000	5,000,000	5,000,000	5,000,000	5,000,000
Improving student assessment and educational accountability .....	2,800,000	2,800,000	2,800,000	2,800,000	2,800,000
Meeting the educational needs of a diverse student population .....	4,000,000	4,000,000	4,000,000	4,000,000	4,000,000
Increasing the effectiveness of state and local education reform efforts .....	2,800,000	2,800,000	2,800,000	2,800,000	2,800,000
Improving postsecondary education .....	2,500,000	2,500,000	2,500,000	2,500,000	2,500,000
Improving adult learning and literacy .....	1,500,000	1,500,000	1,500,000	1,500,000	1,500,000

<sup>1</sup> Multiple awards may be made.

**Estimated Number of Awards:** 7.

**Note:** The Department is not bound by any estimates in this notice.

**Project Period:** Up to 60 months.

**Applicable Regulations:** (a) The Education Department General Administrative Regulations (EDGAR) in 34 CFR Parts 74, 75, 77, 80, 81, 82, 85, and 86; and (b) The regulations for this program in 34 CFR Part 700, as published elsewhere in this issue of the **Federal Register**.

**Priority**

The absolute priorities in the notice of final priorities and post-award requirements for this program, as published elsewhere in this issue of the **Federal Register** apply to this competition.

**Selection Criteria**

In evaluating applications for grants under this program, the Secretary uses the selection criteria in 20 U.S.C. 6031(c)(3)(E) and 34 CFR 700.30.

In accordance with 34 CFR 700.30 (b) and (c), the Secretary has selected evaluation criteria from among those

established in 34 CFR 700.30(e) and has assigned weights to each selected criterion.

In addition, the legislation authorizing the Research and Development Centers program requires all applications for grants to be evaluated according to criteria specified in 20 U.S.C. 6031(c)(3)(E) (i)-(vi). The Secretary has incorporated the statutory selection criteria into the criteria established under 34 CFR 700.30. The statutory criteria are: (3)(B)(iii), (4)(B)(iv), (4)(B)(v), (5)(B)(iv), (5)(B)(v), and (5)(B)(vi).

The Secretary announces the following evaluation criteria and assigned weights for this competition:

(1) **National Significance** (30 points)

(A) The Secretary considers the national significance of the proposed project.

(B) In determining the national significance of the proposed project, the Secretary considers the following factors:

(i) The importance of the problem or issue to be addressed.

(ii) The potential contribution of the project to increased knowledge or understanding of educational problems, issues, or effective practice.

(iii) The potential contribution of the project to the development and advancement of theory and knowledge in the field of study.

(iv) The nature of the products (such as information, materials, processes, or techniques) likely to result from the project and the potential for their effective use in a variety of other settings.

(2) **Quality of the Project Design** (30 points)

(A) The Secretary considers the quality of the design of the proposed project.

(B) In determining the quality of the design of the proposed project, the Secretary considers the following factors:

(i) Whether there is a conceptual framework underlying the proposed activities and the quality of that framework.

(ii) Whether the proposed activities constitute a coherent, sustained program